

A well-preserved three-cent piece can fetch \$10

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Tribune readers.

Q—We found a tiny coin dated 1852 hidden inside an antique desk. A Roman numeral III covers one side of the coin and a star is depicted on the other. What can you tell us about it?

T.R., Cicero

A—You own a three-cent piece, this country's smallest silver coin containing about .02 of an ounce of the precious metal. Uncle Sam issued them in 1851, in part to help people buy postage stamps.

Although popular in the 1850s, the so-called "trimes" disappeared from circulation during the Civil War, as did most coins. After the war in 1865, officials introduced a nickel three-cent piece, phasing out production of the silver coin by 1873. The nickel specimen lasted until 1889, when bureaucrats finally decided the denomination served little useful purpose.

"Good condition" specimens of the 1852 coin retail for about \$10.

Q—The British refer to their small coins as "pennies" and we Americans refer to ours as "cents." Why, then, did you say "Indian-head pennies" in the Nov. 13 column?

J.L., Chicago

A—Many hobby pros insist that "cent" is the only correct name of the smallest-denomination U.S. coin produced. But "penny" has become a popular alternative accepted by most dictionaries. I try to use "cent" on the primary reference and "penny" as an appropriate synonym.

Q—We own three \$1 bills, each with the words "One silver dollar payable to the bearer on demand." Do they have a higher monetary value than normal bills?

W.A., Chicago

A—No; your bills are worth \$1 each as legal tender. Nor will Uncle Sam exchange them for silver dollars because Congress voided the inscription in 1968. Before you spend them, however, be sure to check their value on the hobby market.

Q—We pulled seven Susan B. Anthony dollars out of circulation during the last two years. Are any of them worth saving? Also, doesn't the coin celebrate a birthday this month?

D.I., Western Springs

A—Anthony dollars showing signs of wear have no special value to coin collectors. You're way off on the date; banks released the coins on July 2, 1979.

● As part of an on-going program, the federal government has issued a medal depicting Admiral Hyman G. Rickover in recognition of his work on nuclear reactors. A 1½-inch bronze specimen costs \$1.75 and can be ordered from Bureau of the Mint, 55 Mint St., San Francisco, Calif. 94175.